

Johnstown Public Library
304 Washington Street
Johnstown
Cambria County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5386

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

JOHNSTOWN PUBLIC LIBRARY

HABS No. PA-5386

Location: 304 Washington St., southeast corner of Washington and Walnut streets, Johnstown, Cambria County, Pennsylvania.

Present Owner: Johnstown Flood Museum.

Present Use: Currently under renovation, it will reopen as a museum in spring 1989.

Significance: The library owes its original existence and reconstruction to the steel industry. In 1877 the Cambria Iron Company gave the Washington Street site to the Cambria Library Association, and two years later the original library was built. Greatly damaged in the 1889 flood, the library was rebuilt with an endowment from Andrew Carnegie; the Johnstown library was one of the steel magnate's earliest American philanthropic endeavors.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1890-92; dedicated February 19, 1892.
2. Architect: Addison Hutton. Hutton was born in Westmoreland County into a Quaker family. His early building training came from his father, Joel Hutton, a carpenter in the rural Pennsylvania county. The young Hutton moved to Philadelphia in 1857, and found work in the architectural office of Samuel Sloan. Hutton stayed in Sloan's office until the autumn of 1861, when economic distress caused by the Civil War forced Sloan to dismiss him. Hutton worked alone until 1864 when he and Sloan formed a partnership. Sloan and Hutton was dissolved in 1868, and Hutton practiced alone for the rest of his career. Most of his commissions -- residential and commercial -- were in the Philadelphia area, many for prominent Quakers.

In addition to the 1892 library, Hutton designed many buildings in and around Johnstown, including the original building for the Cambria Library Association (1879), the Cambria Club House (1881), and the offices for the Gautier Works (a subsidiary of Cambria Iron; 1883). The firm of Sloan and Hutton was responsible for the 1867 Wood, Morrell and Company store, and Hutton may have designed the 1891 Penn Traffic store.

3. Original and subsequent owners: Deed No. 44-708 records the 1881 transfer of the site from the Cambria Iron Company to the Cambria Library Association. In 1890 (deed No. 81-92) the Cambria Iron Company gave the adjacent lot to the Library Association. In 1961 Cambria Iron's successor, Bethlehem Steel, re-released the site to the library association (deed No. 760-121). The Johnstown Flood Museum bought the building in 1971.
4. Original and subsequent occupants: The Cambria Library Association occupied the building from 1892 until 1971. The Johnstown Flood Museum has operated a museum there since then.
5. Contractors and builders: Hoover, Hughes and Company were the contractors, Joseph Morgan, Jr., headed construction, and George E. Thackery supervised the mechanical works.

B. Historical Context:

The Cambria Library Association was organized as a private, cooperative institution on February 1, 1870. Each member of the association pledged \$3, and the Cambria Iron Company matched the pledges. Within six months there were 206 members and 770 books. In 1877 the Cambria Iron Company gave the Washington Street site to the association and two years later paid for the erection of a new building. By the time of the 1889 flood, the library -- which owned 6,000 volumes and served as a U. S. government depository -- was free and public, with no charge for borrowing books or taking classes. Classes were offered in geology and mining, metallurgy, mechanical drawing, free-hand drawing, mathematics, physical geography, and political economy. All was financed by the \$42,000 endowment given by officers and directors of the Cambria Iron Company.

The 1889 flood destroyed the library. In a November 1889 letter to Cambria Library Association president (and attorney for the Cambria Iron Company), Cyrus Elder, steel magnate Andrew Carnegie explained his first impressions of the damage to the library:

The first report of the great disaster which I received in Paris told me you had gone. The brick building back of the general offices was stated to be still standing. This I took to be the library, or I should have cabled at once asking that the privilege of restoring it might be accorded to me.

Carnegie then wasted no time in requesting such a privilege, and Elder accepted with equal alacrity; on December 10, 1889 the board of managers of the Cambria Library Association resolved to accept Carnegie's offer of a new building, and thanked him "for this most liberal and grateful manifestation of his sympathy with and interest in the people of Johnstown."

Addison Hutton drew up the plans for the new building, but price negotiations with the contractors became a bit difficult. On May 9, 1890, Elder met with Carnegie in Pittsburgh to get his advice. Carnegie instructed Elder that he wanted nothing at all to do with the contractors, and issued a draft for \$55,332 to cover the costs of the building. This sum apparently proved acceptable to all parties, and the building was dedicated on February 19, 1892.

The dedication ceremony was an elaborate affair, with notables from the Cambria Iron Company and the Cambria Library Association giving speeches about the magnificence of the library, the importance of education, and the generosity of Carnegie. Elder in particular lauded Carnegie's benevolence, regretting that he was not at the ceremony:

Without him our opening ceremonies are like the play of Hamlet with the part of Hamlet omitted. We know how gracefully he can say the most appropriate word, and our programme was arranged mainly for the purpose of seeing and hearing him. . . . That Mr. Carnegie treats this large benefaction as an obligation which we have conferred upon him, makes it, in a certain sense, all the more onerous, and we will all be impressed with the great sense of responsibility in the administration of this trust. That it may be put to the best uses, I invoke the cordial co-operation of all our people. (Johnstown Tribune, February 20, 1892.)

Carnegie did, indeed, see endowing libraries as an obligation. He once explained his interest in philanthropy, particularly as it concerned libraries, with a story from his childhood:

When I was a boy in Pittsburgh Colonel Anderson of Allegheny--a name I can never speak of without feelings of devotional gratitude--opened his little library of four hundred books to boys. . . . My brother and Mr. Phipps, who have been my principal business partners through life, shared with me Colonel Anderson's precious generosity, and it was when reveling in these treasures that I resolved, if ever wealth came to me, that it should be used to establish free libraries, that other poor boys might receive opportunities similar to those for which we were indebted to that noble man. (The Bulletin of the American Iron and Steel Association, January 1, 8, 1890.)

Carnegie's interest in the Johnstown library, however, ran a little deeper than merely ensuring that "other poor boys might receive opportunities."

Along with Henry Clay Frick and Henry Phipps, Jr., Carnegie was one of the early members of the South Fork Fishing and Hunting Club. When the South

Fork Dam burst and the town flooded, Carnegie was in Paris. Up to this point Carnegie had shown no interest in or allegiance to Johnstown; in fact, when he built the Edgar Thompson works in Braddock, Pennsylvania, he raided some of Cambria Iron's best workers for his new plant -- a clearly competitive, perhaps adversarial, action. Yet when news of the disaster reached him, he quickly put forth resolutions to the U. S. Legation in France that the people of Johnstown receive the legation's "profound and heartfelt sympathy" and congratulations for their "numerous acts of noble heroism"; in addition, the legation raised over 40,000 francs for disaster relief for the stricken city. Six months later he volunteered to rebuild the library, spending over \$55,000 to do so. It was never proven conclusively that negligence on the part of the Fishing and Hunting Club caused the dam to break, but Carnegie clearly felt the need for some sort of personal absolution.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The library is a large square building with high massing. The Johnstown Tribune called it "French Gothic."
2. Condition of fabric: The exterior fabric is excellent; the interior is currently being renovated.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The square (65' x 65') three-story building has a full basement. The front facade is broken into three bays, with public entrance doors in the outer bays and smaller double wooden doors leading to a private office in the central bay. The side facades are each broken into four uniform bays; the bays are separated by pilasters that rise above the eaves to become chimneys. The back facade is the same as the front, but there are no public entrances.
2. Foundations: Twenty circular stone piers from 5' to 7' in diameter are founded on a bed of gravel 18' below the first floor.
3. Walls: From the ground to 4' above ground level the walls are ashlar Ohio River sandstone; a cut-stone sill separates this base from the hand-burned buff-colored brick above. The cornice -- actually a molding of corbel arches -- and the window jambs are made of molded brick. The pilasters -- two each on the front and back facades and three each on the side -- are also molded brick.
4. Structural system: Great note is made, in the Johnstown Tribune, of the "heavy arches sprung below ground which support the weight of the outer walls." The interior walls, roof, and floors were steel

reinforced.

5. Chimneys: There are eight brick chimneys, two on each facade. Each chimney has eight chimney pots made of molded brick, and topped by a stone cap.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Each of the outer bays on the front facade contains a large tiled vestibule, that leads to an oak doorway. Decorative wrought-iron gates shield the vestibules. The door in the center bay of the front facade is also oak.
 - b. Windows and shutters: Seven of the eight windows on each of the side facades is a tripartite double-hung one-over-one-light sash; the eighth window on each side facade is a double-hung one-over-one-light sash. On the front and back facades, each of the outer bays has a double-hung one-over-one-light sash window. In the center bay, five double-hung one-over-one-light-sash windows are arranged proportionately across the top half of the bay, and below each of the outer windows there is a double-hung one-over-one-light sash window on the bottom half of the bay.
7. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: The steeply pitched hip roof, covered with Vermont slate, has copper flashings.
 - b. Cornice: The brick cornice is a molding composed of corbel arches. It is separated from the roof and third-story dormers by a copper rain gutter.
 - c. Dormers: There are a pair of large and a pair of small wall dormers on each of the front and back facades, and four uniform wall dormers on each of the sides. Above them, there are small dormers. All of the dormers are sheathed in copper, and all but the small ones are flanked by diagonally set brick pilasters capped with cut stone.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: Running the full width and length of the building, the first floor was an auditorium. The platform used as a stage ran against the south wall. There was a small dressing or preparation room on either side of the platform.

The second floor was the library, which consisted of two glass-partitioned classrooms in the rear corners and a central reading room. The reading room was divided into a children's area, a men's

area, and a women's area. A 20' long librarian's desk separated the closed book stacks in the northern end of the library from the central reading room.

The third floor was a 63' x 25' x 35' gymnasium. The northeast and northwest corners of the gym each contained dressing rooms. There was a gallery housing a running track above the gymnasium.

2. Stairways: The two iron stairways, featuring ornamental wrought-iron railings and oak hand rails, were located in the east and west entrance vestibules of the building. The stair halls on the first floor were laid with white marble tiles with a base skirting of black marble.
3. Flooring: The floors throughout were natural-finished yellow Pennsylvania pine.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Buff-colored plaster.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The interior doors are polished oak.
 - b. Windows: The reading room and gymnasium were illuminated entirely by natural light during the day.
6. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: The library was steam heated from a boiler located on the first floor between the two main entrances. On the second and third floors, steam radiators against the walls beneath the windows provided heat. For the heating system in the lecture hall, air was drawn from outside, passed over a large steam coil and forced by a steam-driven fan blower to all areas of the room.
 - b. Lighting: The only room for which any lighting information is available is the reading room, which had gas jets "of a special design, which give a bright light, free from any shadows from the fixtures themselves."
 - c. Plumbing: There were four toilet rooms: one on the east and west sides of the first and second floors. They were "equipped with all the necessary fixtures of the best quality." The gymnasium dressing rooms had marble-lined showers, which consisted of "a marble stall with a large shower overhead, and its sides are lined with fine brass pipes, containing many minute perforations through which the water issues with considerable force, the action being concentrated at the center of the stall where the bather

stands."

7. Gymnasium equipment: The Johnstown Tribune bragged that the gymnasium in the library "compares favorably with any in the country." It may have, as it contained ten weight machines, traveling rings, flying rings, a horizontal bar, parallel bars, a climbing rope, swords, wooden and iron dumbbells, boxing gloves, a suspended ladder extending across the room, and a pole-vaulting outfit. A padded leather running track was installed in a gallery above the gymnasium.
 8. Original furnishings: The lecture hall featured 300 folding seats, which had iron frames with curved backs and five-ply wood veneer seats. In the reading room, the moderate-sized oak reading tables had matching oak armchairs.
- D. Site: On the southeast corner of Washington and Walnut streets, the library faces north. It was located in a busy commercial area; the Cambria Iron Company offices and the Penn Traffic store were across the street. Next door were shops and hotels.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Early Views: The Johnstown Flood Museum has some; there are also some in the Johnstown Tribune, February 20, 1892.
- B. Bibliography:
- Bobinski, George S. Carnegie Libraries. Chicago: American Library Association, 1969.
- "The Cambria Library to be Rebuilt by Mr. Andrew Carnegie," The Bulletin of the American Iron and Steel Association, 1 and 8 January 1890.
- "1889 Walking Tour" brochure, Johnstown Flood National Memorial.
- "Helping the Workingmen to Help Themselves," The Iron Trade Review 6 June 1912: 1213-19.
- Krause, Paul L. "Patronage and Philanthropy in Industrial America: Andrew Carnegie and the Free Library in Braddock, PA," The Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine 71 (April 1988): 127-145.
- Correspondence between Cyrus Elder and Andrew Carnegie, Carnegie Corporation of New York.
- "The New Cambria Library," Johnstown Tribune, 20 February 1892.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This report was part of a larger project to document the city of Johnstown, Pennsylvania. The project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), Robert Kapsch, chief, at the request of America's Industrial Heritage Project (AIHP). An overview of history of the city (HABS No. PA-5669) provides context for the neighborhoods. See additional HABS reports on buildings in the downtown and other neighborhoods.

This report was prepared by Terri Hartman in August 1988 under the direction of Alison K. Hoagland, HABS historian, and Kim E. Wallace, the supervisory historian of the project. Hartman's and other project historians' work was published as The Character of a Steel Mill City: Four Historic Neighborhoods of Johnstown, Pennsylvania (Washington, D.C.: HABS/HAER, National Park Service, 1989), edited by Kim E. Wallace. Illustrations in the publication include large format photographs taken by HAER photographer Jet Lowe and 35 mm photographs taken by the project historians.